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Luzern Stans Engelberg Bahn Birthday Party

by Ron Smith

The Luzern Stans Engelberg Bahn (LSE) is celebrating its 100th birthday this year. The LSE is a very efficient and busy little railway and to travel on it is to sample the way that public transport should be - comfortable, fast, clean, safe, frequent, accessible and economical.

The railway has an interesting history, and an interesting future with plans for a tunnel to relieve the bottleneck on the line, which is the fiercely graded rack section. I had wanted to attend some of the special events but due to the frustration of having to work for a living to have the means to Switzerland, I could only manage the last one. This was Sunday 4.10.98, the end of the special weekend at Engelberg.

We set off from our friend's house in Luzern and drove to Hergiswil. For the weekend a special day rover ticket was available for just 5 francs. It was only available in the cantons of Nidwalden and Obwalden - hence the Hergiswil starting point.

I was impressed by the lassie in Hergiswil station. She spoke impeccable English and helpfully explained everything, including selling a special reduced price ticket for the car park outside, only available in conjunction with the

purchase of a train ticket. She cheerfully did all this in between nipping smartly across to the other side of the room to apparently set the signals for the approaching trains.

Exactly on time our train rolled in, consisting of the LSE standard set of a Bdeh4/4 motor coach plus two coaches, the last one a driving trailer, and we managed to find a few seats in the well filled train. We were soon off through the Lopper tunnel and up the valley.

The first thing that we noticed as our train curved round into Engelberg was steam puffing up into the grey lowering sky from the car park at the side. It was not a good day for photography, sombre and dull with almost stationary slabs of cloud stubbornly clinging to the sides of the surrounding mountains. This was not deterring the happy children who sat astride the long bogie wagons on the approx. 1 foot gauge railway which was set up in a loop in the car park.

It had two trains operating simultaneously. One consisted of a small 4 wheel petrol engine which bore no resemblance to anything, and towed just two wagons. This was chased around by a delightful 0-4-0 freelance steam engine pulling a line of bogie sit upon wagons. On display in the centre of the track was



Previous page: Engleberg station in the early days vehicles are Tw3, 2 and 11.
Above: The modern image of the LSE this unit features the 100 year celebration graphics.
Below: An LSE panoramic 2nd class coach with the new Alpine Lines graphics.





Above: The 'Train Pulling' event in the article at Engelberg during the centenary celebrations on the 4th October 1998.

a model of a 4-2-0 steam engine, modelled on the loco which hauled the first train in Switzerland.

Returning to the station building we passed a large orange marquee which held the benches and tables set up in typical Swiss fashion, where the "Jubilaums Brunch" was available. We assumed that Bratwurst and potato salad would be available, and determined to return soon. Passing through the station we were heading for a parked green "old timer" coach which appeared to be serving food and drink. It was a "Brünig" coach, but before we could explore further we were energetically roped in (literally) to step down onto the track and make up a team to pull a train! A stout rope was attached to the front of a standard train set, which also had a wooden pole tied across it with coloured streamers at the platform side to measure how far each team pulled the train towards the buffer stops. There was a prize for the best effort. I elected to take the photographs while Christine and Gerhild heaved away at the rope. Amazingly the train moved. Of course it may have had something to do with the smiling and self-conscious train driver who may have been practising creep control, but I still think it was all due to Christine.

After this Herculean effort, we examined the philatelic exhibition and purchased some interesting replica historic postcards. Then

round the front of the station we found a drasine pump trolley. A crowd of young folk were taking turns at pumping the thing vigorously, with a prize for the best effort.

Inside the building a part of the booking hall was set up as puppet theatre, and was full of spell-bound youngsters. There was also a display of various LSE articles for sale in the ticket office, including some attractive reproductions of early posters.

With events winding down, we set off to explore Engelberg. It is one of my favourite places. It always seems cool, still, calm and peaceful, even though it is usually bustling with people. All too soon we were back at the station and on a very full train for Hergiswil. It had rolled in from Luzern and coupled on to a single coach positioned at the buffer stops, to give much needed extra capacity. By the time we disembarked at Hergiswil, we had earned another three-car set at the front, added at Wolfenschiessen, and yet another coach at the rear, though I have no idea where that had been added on!

Altogether a good day out, congratulations to the LSE, and good luck for the next 100 years.